

BLACK BEAR BIOLOGY



The Louisiana black bear is our official state mammal and the largest land animal that inhabits our Sportsman's Paradise. As with any animal, understanding its biology and behavior can help with situations involving black bears.

HABITAT

The Louisiana black bear is a habitat generalist. It occurs primarily in bottomland hardwood forests, which are found in lowland and river floodplains. Hardwoods, such as oaks and hickories, produce valuable foods for bears and other wildlife. Other habitat types used by bears include upland forests, swamps, marshes, salt domes, and agricultural fields.

photo by Steve Uffman



FOOD



Bears quadruple their caloric intake during the fall months in preparation for their upcoming winter dormancy period. They can consume up to 20,000 calories a day in an effort to increase their fat reserves.

While searching for food during fall months, bears roam over large areas and may appear in residential locations, especially if calorie-rich natural foods (acorns, pecans, etc.) are present. They are also attracted to other calorie-rich food sources, such as pet food and household garbage.

DORMANCY

Louisiana black bears enter a period of dormancy during winter months. Bears do not eat, drink, urinate or defecate during this dormancy period, but it is not identical to hibernation that small mammals exhibit.

Female bears must den to give birth, but male bears may remain somewhat active during winter. Males emerge from their dens in early spring and females with cubs emerge several weeks later.

photo by Steve Uffman



MATING

Black bears mate during summer months, and may often be observed in pairs during this period. Both males and females increase their movement during mating season, displaying signs of courtship at this time. Males may fight for dominance/mating rights and follow females throughout their range.

photo by Steve Uffman



BEAR-HUMAN INTERACTIONS

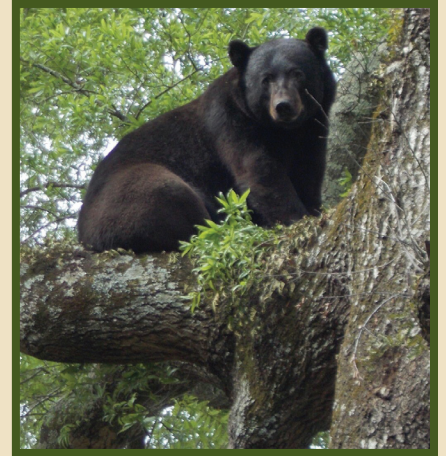
COMMON BLACK BEAR BEHAVIORS



Black bears are naturally curious and will often inspect objects. They may stand up on their hind legs to investigate a smell or noise, or to get a better vantage point. This is not a display of aggressive behavior, but rather an attempt to interpret their surroundings.



Black bears are exceptional climbers, and due to their desire to avoid conflict, bears may often climb trees to escape to a location where the bear feels safe. Bears may also climb trees, deer stands, or other structures out of curiosity.



Black bears have a unique communication system that involves both vocalizations and body posture. When agitated or nervous, bears may “pop” their jaws, blow or huff heavily, and/or swat the ground or a tree. These behaviors are the bear’s method of communicating that you are too close, not signs of aggression or imminent attack. Do not run; instead, slowly back away, increasing the distance between yourself and the bear.



A mother with cubs will typically react to a disturbance in one of two ways: 1.) the mother will encourage the cubs to climb a tree while she remains at the base of that tree, or 2.) she and the cubs will run a short distance to get away from the area. In either case, one should calmly remove oneself from the situation.

WHEN INTERACTING WITH A BEAR

Flattened ears, raised hairs on the back of the neck, and a low, staring gaze could indicate that the bear is considering charging.

If a bear persistently follows you or approaches you:

- Turn and face the bear.
- Raise your arms over your head to make yourself appear larger.
- If the bear gets closer, talk loudly or shout at it.
- Maintain an aggressive demeanor to attempt to intimidate the bear.
- Act together as a group if you have companions.
- Throw non-food objects such as rocks at the bear.
- Use a deterrent such as a stout stick.
- Don’t run and don’t turn away from the bear.
- Don’t leave food for the bear; this encourages further problems.
- Leave the area as soon as the bear leaves.



There has **NEVER** been a recorded case of a black bear attacking a human in Louisiana. In the improbable event that a bear does charge or attack, people are encouraged to not run away or “play dead,” but instead to fight back and display dominance.